

TICK REPELLENTS - FIELD TRIPS

There is only one way to absolutely prevent Lyme disease and that is to prevent tick bites. Among the preventive measures recommended is the use of a tick repellent. Two compounds have been shown to be effective:

1. 'Deet' = N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide
2. Permethrin

Deet is found in many readily available products and in a range of concentrations (see list below). It may be applied to skin or clothing. Permethrin products may be applied only to clothing, which should be allowed to dry for at least 2 hours before dressing. Before using any repellent, be sure to read the label and to follow the directions carefully. These are powerful products* that could cause side-effects if applied carelessly. Deet products are probably the most likely choice. At a maximum, the Deet concentration for adults should never exceed 35%, 15% for children. Lower concentrations are generally recommended:

Deet repellents offer a wide and diverse range of products. Active ingredients run from the low single digits up to 100%. An efficiency curve drawn for Deet would show that the repellent effectiveness begins to drop off quickly in concentrations above 35% Deet. Normal logic says that more is better, but not for Deet. Most experts realize that more frequent application of low-percent Deet products yield better results. Most Deet products are below 35%.

Safety Consulting Services, LTD., Stony Point, NY

Deet repellents may be sprayed on the outer clothing and exposed skin only; never spray directly on the face. In fact, since ticks generally crawl up from the legs, it is really not necessary to spray above the waist. Do not over apply or saturate the fabric. Keep any repellent away from the eyes & mouth.

Repellents have been shown to be safe and effective when used properly. However, if a child (or adult) experiences an adverse reaction to a repellent, it should be washed off immediately, and medical advice sought. And never rely on repellents alone. Tick checks should always be conducted after outdoor activity and at least once a day, especially between April and November.

Commonly available products - approximate Deet concentrations:

- "Bug Out" - 145
- "Cutter" - several products 10 to 28%
- "Off! Skintastic" - 7%
- "Off! Skintastic for Kids" - 5%
- M Ultra-thon" - 25%

*For those concerned about these compounds, it should be pointed out that it is possible to purchase products, probably less effective, but derived from natural sources, such as citrus extracts.

Information contributed by Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the NY Department of Health.